

fits into a narrow conception of what a Work should and must be; her call for less reliance on nationalistic language also fits into this larger discussion, but is no less compelling or important. In the Epilogue, she mentions that, for each identification of a methodology that has historically been problematic or ineffective, she hopes 'to have identified ways forward' (p.151). In this respect, she has most certainly succeeded: *Angel song* is as much a book about the practice of musicology as it is about one specific musicological topic, and will prove to be an invaluable learning text for young scholars working on medieval sources, no matter what their provenance may be.

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Low Countries life

Véronique Roelvink, *Gheerkin de Hondt*.

A singer-composer in the sixteenth-century Low Countries (Utrecht: Donaas Projecten, 2015), €65

Gheerkin de Hondt is not a composer who will be familiar to many. The back cover of Roelvink's book advertises him as 'a fine representative of the large network of singers and composers contributing to one of the most significant periods in the history of music in the Low Countries'. The known details of Gheerkin's life are few and can be easily summarized. He was probably born in Bruges around 1495 as a son of the roofer/slater Jacob de Hondt. He made a career as a singer, *zangmeester* and composer, and is documented in one or more of these capacities in the Nieuwe Kerk of Delft (1521–3 and 1530–32), in St Jacob's church in Bruges (1532–9), and at the Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap in 's-Hertogenbosch (1539–47). He was fired in 1547 because his wife had not taken good care of the choirboys. According to the accounts of the Broederschap he then left for 'Vrieslant', which is where the trail stops. We have no idea what Gheerkin did next and when he died. What we do know is that his musical oeuvre consists of five Masses, four motets, eight chansons and one Dutch polyphonic song.

That, in a nutshell, is the career of Gheerkin de Hondt. And yet Roelvink's book takes up 704 pages. Does that

mean that Gheerkin's career has been described here in painstaking detail? The answer to that question is both yes and no. Yes, because the present book probably mentions and transcribes every known archival passage that mentions Gheerkin, his duties or his music. No, because these passages offer very little information about the composer and his music; they are mostly references in account books from which we learn that Gheerkin was in service.

Roelvink has tried to tackle this problem by concentrating on the cities where Gheerkin worked and the institutions that hired him. Musical life at all three towns is discussed extensively and the rich documentation gives a good impression of Gheerkin's day-to-day work. The two chapters on Bruges present a wealth of information on 16th-century musical life and make a wonderful supplement to Reinhard Strohm's *Music in late medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1990) which concentrates on a slightly earlier period. Roelvink has done a lot of original archival work and the numerous appendices testify to the love and labour that went into it. The author seems to be very precise and is keen to correct mistakes in earlier literature. But now and again, she trips herself up. On p.69, for example, she discusses the remuneration system for singers involving so-called *lootjes* which later could be exchanged for real money. Roelvink hypothesizes that such a 'loot' was most likely a piece of paper with an amount of money written on it. Actually a *loot* (which is Middle Dutch for 'lead') was a little marked or unmarked lead coin and such substitute coins were widely used to reward singers for attending services. At some churches a trade of *lootjes* developed among singers, which resulted in sometimes very strict rules regarding the issue and exchange of *lootjes*.

There is also a little problem with Roelvink's discussion of Gheerkin's whereabouts after he left 's-Hertogenbosch in 1547. She has taken the reference that Gheerkin had left for 'Vrieslant' to mean that he must have travelled to present-day Friesland. A whole chapter is devoted to research in towns such as Leeuwarden, Franeker, Sneek and Bolsward. But after some 15 pages she has to conclude that little trace of polyphony can be found in these places, and that Gheerkin could not be located anywhere. It would have been better to cut down the whole section on Friesland to one or two pages and consider the possibility that Gheerkin travelled to West Friesland (currently part of the province of North Holland) which contained a number of towns with polyphonic traditions. Any of the main churches in Alkmaar, Enkhuizen, Hoorn or Medemblik might have offered a temporary safe haven for Gheerkin. These are, of course, minor quibbles. On the whole Roelvink's archival work seems to be meticulous.

As might be expected, the focus on towns and institutions has its downsides. The chapters on Delft and 's-Hertogenbosch draw heavily on earlier literature. Much of the information in the two chapters on 's-Hertogenbosch is taken from Roelvink's own 2002 study of musical life at the *Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap* (*Gegeven den zangeren. Meerstemmige muziek bij de Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap te 's-Hertogenbosch in de zestiende eeuw*). One wonders if it was really necessary to republish so much of that information. Perhaps the author felt the need to be as complete as possible. This would also explain why there are over 200 pages of appendices with transcriptions of archival documents, lists of singers in the places where Gheerkin worked, enumerations of feasts, inventories of manuscripts, and all sorts of other tables and lists. Though parts of these appendices are a fount for names of 16th-century singers, *zangmeesters* and composers, their usability is unfortunately hampered by the absence of an index of names.

My main concern, however, is that Gheerkin's music receives far less attention than the towns and institutions where he worked. To be sure, the second part of the book, consisting of some 125 pages, deals with the musical output, but many pages are devoted, again, to information that can easily be listed. There is a sketch of the sources and information on models, texts and genres, but anything that touches the music itself remains superficial. This left me, in the end, wondering about the nature and qualities of Gheerkin's compositions. Having read this section, it is still not very clear to me how Gheerkin's music relates to that of his contemporaries. Roelvink seems to have been aware of the shortcomings in this respect and mentions in her introduction that it was not the purpose of this book to provide 'a detailed musical theoretical analysis of Gheerkin's work'. I am not sure I understand what she means by this, but the discussion of the music that she did incorporate is, in my opinion, too superficial and too little.

In summary, this book should certainly be read by all who are interested in early 16th-century musical life in the Low Countries. For readers who are interested in the day-to-day activities of singers and the structure of musical institutions, the present book has much to commend it. It also offers all details that are available on the life of Gheerkin de Hondt. But the book will probably disappoint those who want to learn more about the musical style of Gheerkin and his contemporaries. For them, good news may be ahead, however: the author is working on a complete edition of Gheerkin's music.

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Fretting about tuning

David Dolata, *Meantone temperaments on lutes and viols* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2016), \$40

'What is the point of having movable frets if you don't move them? It's like owning a Ferrari ... all its handling capacity and power under the hood are reduced to nothing but unrealized potential.' Right off in the introduction to *Meantone temperaments on lutes and viols* David Dolata ignores a cultural law propounded by Curt Sachs around 1930, to wit, things that are technically possible are often not put into practice. In Sachs's words, 'the vessel is not filled'. No doubt movable frets can be moved, but this would have left marks on surviving old necks, which is not the case.

Dolata deals with his subject in three chapters: historical summary, description of temperaments, and practical and partly useful advice for tuning and care of the instrument. (A word of warning, though: cleaning pegs with nail polish remover may ruin the substance of the wood.) But his arguments stand on feet of clay. Judging from his bibliography, he refers to hardly any sources—and if so, in English translation—but relies on second-hand information. This is particularly problematic in the case of German-language texts, and a brief aside of a native German speaker may be in order here. A significant part of the debate among German scholars is about the meaning of terms: the older the text, the more controversial. Moreover English has about twice as many terms as German, with more precisely defined meanings, whereas German words may comprise various meanings. (For example, there is only one word—'verachten'—to signify 'hold in contempt, disdain, loathe, despise, scorn', so that an ambiguous German text appearing as crystal clear in English is misleading.) Apparently the English-speaking world is under the impression that Arnolt Schlick tuned in 1/6-comma meantone (p.180). The original German permits no such conclusion, leaving aside the question of how such a complicated organ tuning could have been achieved in 1510—in the absence of computers—with nothing but a monochord. By definition, early tunings had to be easy to tune.

Sometimes simple statistics from an easily accessible book, such as Howard Mayer Brown's *Instrumental music printed before 1600*, help to put things into perspective: among 537 printed items, 245 are for fretted instruments,